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Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival: Between the national and the global

The first edition of the Antalya Golden Orange International Film Festival[1] was launched fifty years ago in 1964, at a time when the international success of the director Metin Erksan[2] ignited national support for the creation of a Turkish film festival. Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival has primarily been a national film festival, despite occasional claims to internationality. The history of the festival is also tainted by political aspirations. Antalya's rivalry with the Golden Boll Film Festival in neighboring Adana[3] provides an interesting case study for understanding the ways in which tensions between political parties and municipalities may affect film festival organisation.

Antalya and Adana are run by competing and conflicting political parties. The film festivals in both cities underwent changes in programming and other activities due to municipal election results in 2009. As Turkey's oldest existing film festival, Antalya's lack of consistency attracted the attention of other city-run film festivals across the country that consider it a model for their own events.[4] Neither Antalya nor Adana fulfill their missions to act as truly national events. Instead, by fuelling rival programming they have polarised filmmakers and the public. In addition, because they devote a great deal of resources to local activities and the national political agenda, neither festival can be considered transnational in scope. Political rivalry mixed with populism reduces the visibility of Turkish filmmakers both nationally and internationally, while nepotism and political discourses stoke the popularity of local government at the expense of filmmakers and audiences alike.

A city management-driven festival

Antalya and Adana are both located along the Mediterranean shores of Turkey. Antalya, with its year-round warm climate, is a tourist spot famous for its beaches and night clubs. The local population has a relaxed attitude towards life and they are mostly of a social democratic mindset. Antalya is a multicultural city with a significant

Eastern European population. Adana, on the other hand, is an industrial city known for its cotton production. It is also the birthplace of Yılmaz Güney, a political activist filmmaker who won the Cannes Golden Palm in 1982 for *Yol*.^[5]

Dr. Avni Tolunay, the mayor of Antalya from 1963-1973, pushed for the foundation of a national film festival in Turkey. During his administration a municipality-controlled foundation for the arts was created: Antalya Kültür Sanat Turizm Vakfı (AKSAV). Beginning in 1985, AKSAV controlled the Antalya festival budget and its programming. The establishment of an arts and culture foundation managed by elected city officials created a two-way political pull. The festival was used as proof by the current mayor that tax money is well-spent for the good of the city inhabitants. Also, the central government regarded the festival mainly as a showcase for cultural spectacles. Because of the scarcity of city funds the elected mayor needed to rely on additional national funds that were managed by the central government. Since 2009 problems began to arise when the city and central government did not see eye to eye – that is, whenever the two seats of government came from different political parties with opposing views.

In the autumn of 2012 these two large and well-established film festivals faced a stand-off. For the first time in Turkish film history directors were forced to choose between Antalya and Adana, as both festivals required films to be world premieres. Adana, originally in operation from 1969-1973 and revitalised in 1992, was traditionally held two weeks earlier than Antalya. While Antalya was attractive to filmmakers for being one of the oldest major film festivals in Turkey, Adana offered the highest monetary prize (\$200,000 USD). The result was that experienced directors with an artistic track record chose Adana over Antalya, and Antalya became the choice of first-time directors. Film critics were also divided on the issue of favoring Adana for awarding a large monetary prize or Antalya for giving opportunities to young filmmakers.

There have been debates over the economic feasibility of running a festival with a huge deficit for political reasons.^[6] In 2010, by a legal technicality, the popular Adana mayor Aytaç Durak was replaced by Zihni Aldıraz, who is a member of the ultra-nationalist conservative right MHP (Nationalist Action Party). In Antalya the elected mayor represented the Republican People's Party (CHP), the left-wing opposition. Following this festival battle Antalya and Adana became the sites for a cultural-political stand-off. For example, where Adana chose popular films with established directors, Antalya chose Kurdish films and films dealing with social problems encountered by women.

Film festival as populist spectacle

One should regard the transformations of the Antalya Film Festival in the past two years in conjunction with the city's move towards political populism. After the 2009 local elections the ruling conservative-right party AKP lost the city government to the social democrat party CHP. The current mayor of the Antalya Metropolitan Municipality is Mustafa Akaydın (CHP). A former president of Antalya's Akdeniz University, Akaydın entered politics after his second-term appointment as university president was blocked for political reasons. As a result, Akaydın accepted the CHP nomination as mayor of Antalya and defeated Menderes Türel of the AKP. During his election campaign Akaydın made it his priority to denounce the lavish film festival spending by Türel from 2005-2008.

After his election one of Akaydın's first moves was to cancel a contract with TÜRSAK, the Istanbul-based Turkish Foundation of Cinema and Audio-visual Culture, which was responsible for the festival's organisation between 2005 and 2008. The contract was awarded to AKSAV instead, Antalya's very own festival foundation. Previously, Menderes Türel invited TÜRSAK to change the festival into a Cannes-style event. As a

result of the vision of TÜRSAK president Engin Yiğitgil and the foundation's management style the festival blossomed. Antalya featured red carpet premieres, Oscar-winning artists wining and dining with Turkish stars, a Eurasian Film Market for the promotion of Turkish films, and many parties. The aim was to show the world how prestigious Antalya Film Festival was.

After Türel lost the election to Akaydın in 2009 the festival management adopted a novel approach – it was to be a 'People's Festival'. The new Antalya Film Festival tickets were priced at merely \$1 for students and elders, with free access to all women. Artists moved to the background and the citizens of Antalya were in the spotlight. Galas were hosted during the daytime while evenings were reserved for free concerts rather than exclusive parties. Many Antalya citizens attended daytime screenings and asked pressing questions to filmmakers during discussion sessions. Programs not designed with a public component in mind were cancelled.

One particularly interesting change concerns the 'Filmmakers of the Future' program that previously served film production students, which was cancelled in 2009. The aim of the program was to invite ten students from each film department in Turkey, give them unlimited access to festival events, and host training sessions by industry professionals for them. The program was replaced with the 'People's Orange' film project that teams film students from Antalya and ordinary Antalya citizens who want to make films. These teams make short films during the festival which are then screened at a special event. Another loss has been the deactivation of the International Eurasian Film Market. This event assisted Turkish filmmakers in opening up Asian markets and organising activities such as workshops on development, distribution, and marketing.

With these transformations in mind we can consider the function of film festivals for cities like Antalya. I would argue that its primary role is political. Antalya Film Festival has always been appropriated to support the city administration's ideology. Since the rise to power of the CHP, blaming the previous administration for lavish spending and mismanagement is a repeated political discourse. The organisers and the governing body of Antalya Film Festival often claim that the previous festival management brought the city to the brink of bankruptcy.

Programming: The creation of national heroes

The Antalya Film Festival includes a competition in four categories: features, documentaries, dramatic shorts, and international features. There are also out-of-competition screenings of select films from various international festivals. Recent programming presented choices from Venice, Cannes, Sundance, Telluride, and Berlin. Like under the previous management, there have been high-profile films screened out of competition. The programming also highlighted independent productions from Europe and Asia.

Since 2005 Antalya Film Festival has been a launching pad for new talent in Turkish cinema. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz, Semih Kaplanoğlu, and Reha Erdem all became famous after their first festival successes at Antalya. The news coverage of the festival including live broadcasting of the awards ceremony and speeches combined to help promote the names of these new Turkish filmmakers. Though box office (or even distribution) success is not guaranteed, the awarded directors become national heroes in the Turkish media.

Antalya's role in 'making national heroes' is interesting. The festival juries seem to target the underdog in the last ten years. Festival buzz draws the attention of local media to the directors and also influences the festival audiences, who show up in large numbers for the gala events. Typically, the Q&A sessions following competition screenings include a scandalous question which generates even more publicity and enhances public awareness of the film and director. Several members of SİYAD, the official film critics association of Turkey, reveal their top choice days before the awards ceremony, thereby giving more fodder to the local media. The awards for Nuri

Bilge Ceylan's *Uzak/Distant* (2002) and Semih Kaplanoğlu's *Yumurta/Egg* (2007) were seen as indications of international success by the local media. The best film of the festival is then presented as Turkey's official entry for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.

Antalya also provides a venue for the protection of national cinema culture. Since 2009, the festival presents restorations of old and forgotten Turkish films (e.g. *Dry Summer/Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*). These restorations are funded by Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation, established in partnership with Fatih Akın. The festival contributed to the restoration of all of Yılmaz Güney's films, which were banned by the military coup in 1980. To protest that censorship, the festival did not give awards in 1979 and 1980. In 2011 the awards for the 1979 and 1980 competitions were given retroactively to their rightful owners in a special ceremony. The year 2011 was also a special year for women at the festival. Not only was the entire jury composed of women, the festival management asked novelist-journalist İlhami Algör to program a special DVD collection of women in Turkish cinema in the 1980s. In addition, Antalya Film Festival publishes two book series. In cooperation with SİYAD, the festival created the series *Decades of Turkish Cinema*. The other series is dedicated to directors and actors who receive the lifetime achievement award.

Conclusion

Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival faces many challenging tasks, including contributing economically to the city, providing cultural services to citizens, and supporting the municipal government and bureaucrats in branding strategies for local and national politics. Considering such diverse objectives, the question arises as to whether a city-run film festival's main role is to propagate the culture of cinema to the public or to advance political agendas. In the Turkish context, foundations that organise film festivals are often controlled by city governments as political-bureaucratic structures bound by local and central politics. Successive management teams can easily erase each other's contributions. For example in Antalya, when financial sponsors close to the ruling party AKP withdrew their support after a CHP mayor was elected and government support from the Ministry of Tourism and Culture was discontinued as well.^[7]

Political tensions harmed the reputation of Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, yet the citizens of Antalya welcomed the new localised festival approach. After witnessing these conflicts one can only hope that perhaps one day another model of a national film festival can be created in Turkey, one that would resolve such conflicts. This would necessitate a festival in which creative and organisational choices are not dictated by politics nor the economy of cultural space.

Murat Akser (University of Ulster/Kadir Has University)

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[1] <http://www.altinportakal.org.tr/en>.

[2] Erksan won the Golden Bear at the 14th Berlin International Film Festival for his film *Dry Summer* (*Susuz Yaz*, 1964) and received the Biennale Award at the Venice Film Festival two months later.

[3] <http://www.altinkozafestivali.org.tr/index.php/en/>

[4] Koca 2012.

[5] The award was given *ex aequo* to Costa-Gavras for *Missing* (1982).

[6] Evren 2012; Akaydn 2012.

[7] The minister himself, who had been a regular festival attendee, stopped coming when the CHP mayor was elected in Antalya.

← [The business of audience festivals: Calgary International Film Festival 2012](#)

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